

Remarks by U.S. Consul General Valerie Belon
Independence Day Reception
July 1, 2011

Bon noche. Bon bini.

Masha danki pa yuda nos ku nos selebrashon di e di doshenti-trintisinku aniversario di independensha di Merka.

Te ahenda mi ta siñando Papiamentu. Pesei, mi ta preferá sigui mi speech na Ingles.

I hope to give more of my speech in Papiamentu next year. I have one year to study up.

As I said, I am delighted that all of you could join us today to help us celebrate the 235th anniversary of my country's independence.

I would like to recognize several of our most distinguished guests and I apologize in advance, if I miss anyone important or mispronounce your names.

From Curacao

Governor Frits Goedgedrag

PM Gerrit Schotte

Finance Minister George Jamaloodin

Justice Minister Elmer Wilsoe

Economics Minister Nasser Hakim

From Aruba

Deputy PM Mike de Meza, thank you Minister de Meza for coming

Infrastructure Minister Benny Sevinger

From St. Maarten

Finance Minister Hiro Shigemoto

Health Minister Cornelius de Weever

I would also like to recognize former Netherlands Antilles PM, Mrs. Emily De Jongh-Elhage

I am deeply honored by the presence of the Governor, PM and all the Ministers who have come today, particularly those who travelled from other islands. Thank you.

It is a great privilege for me to represent the United States of America to the six islands of the Dutch Caribbean – your islands – the Caribbean portion of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

I think I am the luckiest person in America's diplomatic corps to be assigned to such a beautiful place where the people are so friendly and welcoming. I am particularly grateful to the people

of Curacao, who I feel have adopted me and my daughter. Lucy and I will always treasure the friends we have made here, whether they be school playmates and fellow parents, my fellow Rotarians, or our partners in government. Thank you for making Lucy and me feel so at home here in dushi Korsou.

I am here to build and strengthen partnerships. Curacao and the other Kingdom islands share a lot of **common interests** with the United States.

First and foremost we share common interests in

Counternarcotics, Safety, and Security – Making sure the Caribbean is a hostile place for drug traffickers to do business will make your islands safer and will also protect the United States from the terrible scourge of illicit drugs. Common interests. That is why the USAF FOLs are based in Curacao and Aruba. They are an important part of our multilateral effort to fight narcotics trafficking by spotting suspicious planes and vessels. The information FOL planes gather is passed to local law enforcement officials who have jurisdiction to interdict, seize, and make arrests. Common interests. That is also why our Drug Enforcement Agency works so closely with your police and prosecutors to ensure that drug traffickers are brought to justice. Fighting organized crime together, whether it be trafficking in persons, weapons, or narcotics. Common interests. It is my goal to maximize safety and security for the three million Americans who visit my consular district every year. These efforts will also help ensure your islands are safe & secure and that your tourism sectors will continue to grow and thrive. Common interests.

We also share close bonds in

Culture and Sports – The consulate recently sponsored a group of American dancers from New York during African-American Heritage Month. Their collaborations with local dancers to produce dancing flash mobs in Punda were a sight to behold.

In sports, we share the bond of baseball. I apologize that my country steals your best to play in Major League Baseball, but they represent your country very well.

We also share a common

History – A year after Peter Stuyvesant was Director of the DWI colony of Curacao, he was sent to New Amsterdam, which we Americans affectionately call New York.

A century later, the Caribbean portion of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was the first to recognize the new nation of the United States of America, when Fort Oranje on St. Eustatius fired its famous first salute to a vessel of the revolutionary American Navy in 1776.

235 years later the Dutch Caribbean and the United States of America still share a bond as close allies and dear friends.

Before for I read a message from President Obama, I wanted to sincerely thank my staff for their tireless efforts over the last several weeks to put this event together.

I also wanted to express appreciation for the generosity of our 18 sponsors, particularly the National Investment Bank, Ennia, Valero, and Price Waterhouse Coopers. Without them, we could not have funded our fireworks display which will begin at eight o'clock. My staff tells me that this is the first time in 10 years that we've had fireworks for the 4th of July and I hope it will not be the last.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BARACK OBAMA

To all who are gathered at our embassies and consulates around the world, happy Fourth of July.

Today is a day to celebrate the very essence of America — the spirit and freedoms that have defined us as a people for more than two centuries and that have inspired countless others around the world.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you and your families, civilian and military — Americans serving far from home in every corner of the globe.

Every single one of you is an ambassador for America.

You are the backbone of our foreign policy, and I want to thank you for the alliances you strengthen, the partnerships you forge, the rights and freedoms you defend, and the bonds between people that you build every day.

I also want to salute our extraordinary local staff and your families who have made the decision to work with us.

the work you do every day is absolutely vital to the future of all our countries, and I thank you for your service.

Finally, I know that many of you are joined today by our friends and partners in your host countries.

I want all of you to know that strengthening our ties with your countries, on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect, will always be a cornerstone of my foreign policy.

Because today we face challenges that no single country can meet alone.

We will only realize the security, prosperity and opportunity that our peoples seek if we recognize the humanity we share and work together in common purpose.

That's what all of you do every day.

That's what we can achieve together.

So thank you for your service.

Thank you for your partnership.

God bless you all, and have a very happy Fourth of July.

BARACK OBAMA